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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, May 9, 2008

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May 9, 2008

Boyfriend charged in baby's death

21-year-old facing up to life on murder, child abuse counts

Derek Wallbank
Lansing State Journal

April McCoy said she was headed to a doctor's appointment Tuesday when a frantic phone call turned her world upside down.

The Lansing woman said her boyfriend called to say that her 13-month-old baby, Laycee Grace Johnson, was not breathing. Laycee died the next day.

And Thursday, McCoy's boyfriend, Vincent Soto, 21, was charged with murder in connection with Laycee's death.

"I feel very betrayed," McCoy said. "But he never showed any signs of violence toward me. I thought he loved her so much."

Soto, who was arraigned via video link and was visible on a TV monitor in the courtroom, bowed and shook his head as District Court Judge Louise Alderson read the charges of murder and first-degree child abuse against him. The maximum sentence for murder is life in prison.

Lansing police said Laycee was rushed to Sparrow Hospital in critical condition Tuesday afternoon after a man called 911 and claimed she had fallen and was not breathing. She was pronounced dead Wednesday morning.

Jennifer Saxton, McCoy's friend, said she saw Laycee Grace in the hospital Wednesday soon after she died.

"She had knuckle prints on the side of her head. The other side of her head was black and blue," said Saxton, a friend of McCoy's.

"If you would have seen that baby, you wouldn't have believed it."

Soto's mother, Jennifer Morikawa, sat in the courtroom with about a dozen family members during the arraignment. She cried as the judge read the charges.

"I'm not saying he's innocent," Morikawa said of her son before the arraignment. "I'm not saying he's guilty. I don't know."

"I just want people to quit slamming him until all the facts come out."

Soto is being held without bond at the Ingham County Jail. He requested a court-appointed attorney and will next appear before District Court Judge Frank DeLuca for a 10 a.m. preliminary examination Thursday.

Saxton set up a fund at Fifth Third Bank in East Lansing and has begun soliciting donations to help cover the expenses of Laycee's funeral and burial.

Soto's aunt, Linda Craig, said she can't understand why her nephew would have killed his girlfriend's baby.

Craig said she understands that Soto faces up to life in prison, but hopes courts will show leniency.

"Honestly, I'm hoping for him to get help. Don't just throw the book at him," she said. "He's just a kid himself."

Staff writers Susan Vela and Scott Davis contributed to this report. Contact Derek Wallbank at 267-1301 or dwallbank@lsj.com.

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No charges planned in Port Huron child's ATV crash

Friday, May 9, 2008 11:28 AM EDT

PORT HURON, Mich. (AP) -- No charges will be filed against the parents of a 2-year-old boy who was injured after driving an all-terrain vehicle over a 5-foot embankment in Charlevoix County.

Sutton Andrew Majeske of Port Huron was operating the child-sized four-wheeler on Sunday when it crashed.

Sutton suffered a broken jaw and facial cuts. He originally was listed in critical condition, but improved quickly and has been released from Hurley Medical Center in Flint.

The Charlevoix County prosecutor's office says it determined there was no criminal activity or neglect that would justify filing charges.

Chief Assistant Prosecutor Shaynee Fanara tells the Times Herald for a story Thursday that the boy apparently learned how to operate the ATV by watching others ride it. He jumped aboard when his parents weren't watching.

Information from: Times Herald, <http://www.thetimesherald.com>

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Foster Parents of the Year



DONALD AND Pamela Robertson

Donald and Pamela Robertson of West Bloomfield were honored April 29 with Oakland County's Honorable Joan E. Young Foster Parents of the Year Award. It was presented to the couple at "Circle of Light," an event sponsored by CARE House of Oakland County, the Department of Human Services and the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, as part of CARE House's programming for National Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month.

The Robertsons were nominated by the Michigan Department of Human Services for their total commitment to the children they have cared for during the past eight years. They participate regularly in foster parent training and although certified in Oakland, they also allow Wayne County to use their home as a "borrowed bed." They serve as an example to other foster parents; they ensure that the children's education, all counseling and therapeutic appointments, visitations and sibling visits go smoothly;

keep a positive attitude and have adopted one of the children in their care. The children say the Robertsons are very loving, caring and involved. The Robertsons are very patient with the foster care arrangement and make the children feel that this is their home. The children really appreciate these foster parents.

Pamela Robertson is a teacher in the West Bloomfield school system and her husband is a Detroit Police Department retiree. Because of their professional experience, both know how to ensure the children's educational and other needs are met. Pamela is able to navigate through school systems and Donald understands troubled youth. As a retiree, he is able to work with the children on a full-time basis and transport them to all their appointments.

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Front
THE MICHIGAN

Author: Fund preschools

Standards needed for early education, he says

Friday, May 09, 2008

BY DAVID JESSE
The Ann Arbor News

For years, the growing universal preschool movement has been driven at the state and local level, leading to a wide variety in standards, author David Kirp said Thursday in Ypsilanti.

He hopes that will change some day and that the federal government will decide to supply an infusion of money and tie it to high standards for teachers.

He's not predicting that will happen anytime soon.

Kirp was the keynote speaker at the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation's International Conference Thursday afternoon. He is the author of "The Sandbox Investment: The Preschool Movement and Kids-First Politics" and is an advocate for universal preschool.

In a question-and-answer session Kirp talked about what states are doing well and not doing well in providing universal preschool.

"There needs to be a plan with benchmarks," he said.

He cited Oklahoma, where the state changed the school age from five to four in order to provide funding for preschool.

He also talked about Texas, where teachers are required to have a college education with some training in early education. However, he noted Texas doesn't have any class-size laws. He said he's seen classes with one teacher and 40 students.

Kirp said the growth in universal preschool is due largely to increases in research tied to economics and also increased advocacy.

The most famous preschool research project was conducted by High/Scope at Perry Preschool. It started in 1962 and has lasted for more than 40 years. It showed that a high quality early childhood program has a dramatic impact on the lives of poor children, improving their educational success, increasing their adult earnings, reducing their criminal activity and returning nearly \$13 to taxpayers for every dollar invested into the program.

"The research all came together," he said. "All the research is showing the benefits for kids from well-done programs."

Having a well-done program means having a planned curriculum and teachers who know what they are doing, rather than preschool teachers who are just child care workers, he said.

David Jesse can be reached at djesse@annarbornews.com or at 734-994-6937. Join the discussion at blog.mlive.com/study_hall.

THE DAILY Reporter

[Print this story](#)

Battered wife defense not to be heard in next week's open murder trial

[Print Page](#)

By Don reid

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COLDWATER — Jurors who hear the case next week against Ana Marie Sandoval-Ceron, charged in the September 2006 stabbing murder of Ricardo (Ricky) Prieto, will not hear any testimony about “battered wife syndrome” or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a defense.

Branch County Circuit Court Judge Michael Cherry issued the ruling Wednesday after meeting with Branch County Prosecutor Kirk Kashian and defenses attorneys Rhonda Ives and Eusebio Solis.

Attorney Solis put on the record, after the conference, that two professionals from Pines Behavioral Services found that Sandoval-Ceron, 38, suffered from PTSD. There was not enough relevancy to the case to give testimony to a jury.

In February, Judge Cherry ruled Dr. Frioza Van Horn, Ph.D., a clinic psychologist who specializes in treating abused women, would “unfairly, impermissibly and prejudicially impact the state’s case confusing the jury” by testifying about the battered wife syndrome.

Dr. Van Horn said the defendant and others who knew her said she had a history of being abused — going back to her childhood. She also indicated that Prieto was emotionally abusing Sandoval-Ceron the day of the death by accusing her of letting one of their children be sexually abused and telling her she was a bad mother. Witnesses said he also cursed at her and called her names because she and a friend were headed to a “girls’ night out.”

Sandoval Ceron suffered from PTSD, a recognized mental disorder, the doctor said. The defendant said she remembers little of what lead up to the stabbing.

On both issues, the judge said there was not enough “nexus” between the disorder and the facts of the case to aid the jury. A jury will be selected Monday for a week-long trial. If convicted as charged, she would face life without parole.

Sandoval-Ceron is charged with open murder for stabbing Prieto — the father of her three children — to death at a wedding reception of a friend. The two had been arguing and Prieto struck Sandoval-Ceron bloodying her lip.

Witnesses said the woman ran into the house, at Garfield and US-12, picked up the cake knife and returned to the yard, where she stuck the knife into Prieto’s chest while her children looked on.

Kashian told Judge Cherry he has Sandoval-Ceron’s oldest daughter listed as a witness in the case “but there is a question of whether she or the other children will be called.” The daughter made a damaging statement to police about the mother’s intentions.

Attorney Solis wanted reference to that statement removed from a video-taped interview with the defendant — given to the Michigan State Police — before it is played to the jury

because it would be "hearsay and highly prejudicial."

Judge Cherry said he will rule on that issue if the girl does not testify.

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Food drive Saturday

Friday, May 09, 2008

WEST MICHIGAN -- Rising food and energy costs, and a scarcity of jobs are forcing more families to turn to food pantries for help. Mail carriers across West Michigan hope to pick up more than they deliver Saturday through the National Association of Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger food drive. People can leave a sturdy bag -- preferably with a handle -- containing nonperishable foods next to their mailboxes before mail delivery, or drop off donations at participating post offices. Since it began in 1993, the drive has collected more than 765 million pounds of food.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Food drive to help 'Stamp out Hunger'

Friday, May 09, 2008

By Nicolas Persons

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Letter carriers nationwide will be doubling as food collectors this weekend.

Postal workers in Bay City and throughout the nation this Saturday will be taking part in "Stamp Out Hunger," a U.S. Postal Service initiative to collect food for the needy.

Area residents are being asked to put out non-perishable food items - such as canned soup, rice or cereal - in a durable container by their mailboxes before the regular mail delivery time on Saturday. The food will be collected and distributed to area food pantries.

"It (makes) a dramatic impact," said Bay City Postmaster Julie Jacobsen. "Food pantries have said for years that this one day gives them the greatest variety of food they get through the entire year."

Last year's event raised 46,000 pounds of food in Bay County. The most successful year was in 2002, when it gathered 70,000 pounds.

Individual volunteers also will help collect the items, as the carrier vehicles can only hold about 500 pounds each, according to Jacobsen. She said it doesn't help that it is the day before Mother's Day, meaning the trucks will be more full than normal.

"There's a lot of people out there who have lots of food. It's a good way to clean your cupboard out and help people at the same time," said Matt Little, a Bay City letter carrier. "I think this is a great way to really help these people."

Jacobsen said the program, which began in 1993, is "the largest single food drive in the country on any given day."

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Realtors' gazebo drive collects food, \$12,000 funds

Friday, May 09, 2008

The sixth annual Fill the Gazebo event for the Gleaners Community Food Bank of Livingston County has been called a success.

Preliminary totals for the food drive compiled by the sponsoring Livingston County Association of Realtors are \$12,000 in cash and checks, representing 36,000 meals, and 7,364 pounds of nonperishable food and personal care items, which corresponds to another 5,753 meals.

"Thanks to the Realtors and their partners, we have met the goal to provide one semitruck load of food for May," said Erica Karfonta, general manager of Gleaners Community Food Bank of Livingston.

The totals were expected to grow over the next couple of weeks as late donors contribute food items and cash, Karfonta said.

The target for this year was 40,000 meals, which would fill one semi, Karfonta said.

The need has been much greater during the current economic downturn, Karfonta said. The Gleaners' goal is 2.5 truckloads of food a month to keep its Shared Harvest Pantry stocked to meet the growing demand for food.

"We are still in need of donors to cover our need for two semitrucks this summer," she said.

Those wishing to donate money or nonperishable food and personal care items may drop them off at any Realtor in Livingston County or at the Gleaners office located with the Shared Harvest Food Pantry at 5924 Sterling Drive, off Dorr Road in Genoa Township, or call 1-866-GLEANER, ext. 331.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Postal food drive will help fill growing need

Friday, May 09, 2008

We tend to take for granted the ubiquitous presence of the U.S. Postal Service, but the power and reach of its work force will be clear on Saturday.

The people who deliver our mail will be also picking up non-perishable food donations tomorrow as they do their routes - but it's up to us to contribute.

The Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive is an annual effort by the National Association of Letter Carriers, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. It's the country's largest one-day food drive, now in its 16th year. Locally, the drive benefits Food Gatherers, a nonprofit that works year-round to provide food for residents of

Washtenaw County in need.

And the need is great.

For many months, local agencies and food banks have reported an increase in demand for food aid, in large part driven by the prolonged economic downturn. The state's unemployment rate is hovering around 8 percent, and though Washtenaw County has weathered the struggling economy better than other parts of the state - our jobless rate is 4.9 percent - we face plenty of challenges here, too. The most recent data from the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth showed that this area lost 700 manufacturing jobs between February and March - that sector has been especially hard hit.

Meanwhile, soaring energy costs have taken a toll on household budgets. Food prices, too, have been spiraling higher - some analysts predict overall food inflation for Americans could double in 2008, according to Associated Press reports.

If you are in a position to give, please do - either on Saturday or whenever you can. (More information about donating directly to Food Gatherers - including how to hold your own food drive - is online at www.foodgatherers.org.)

And thanks to each of the local postal workers who'll be carrying an extra load this weekend.

With their help and yours, no one in our community should go hungry.

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Church service project benefits volunteers, those in need

Friday, May 09, 2008

By Ingrid Jacques
For the Citizen Patriot

It's a sunny Saturday afternoon and the kitchen of the Napoleon United Methodist Church is bustling with activity. Six volunteers efficiently move about as they fashion a meal that will feed more than 100 people at a Jackson shelter. And they have only a few hours to complete their mission.

But no one seems stressed or worried about the task at hand -- they've done this before.

Pat Heselschwerdt of Napoleon and her daughter, Dee Ferens of Jackson, chat in a lively manner as they help prepare the food.

The Rev. Jennifer Jue, pastor of the church, and her twin children, Jonathan and Heather Jue-Wong, 14, are moving about with ingredients in tow. Judy Warren of Liberty Township is also helping out. Her husband, Don, is usually there, too.

Jue said making the food together is a fun, hands-on activity for couples and families and that she enjoys spending this time with her children. "It's a neat project," she said.

By 4 p.m., they will have to have all the food loaded to drive over to the Jackson Interfaith Shelter. When it comes to making sure the meal is there on time, Hesel-

schwerdt said there have only been a few "close calls" in the past few years. Much like making a meal at home, there are always a few unexpected glitches.

Once they arrive at the shelter, they will prepare to serve the food buffet style, first to the residents of the shelter and then to anyone in need of a good meal.

Serving the food is an efficient process at the shelter and both groups take around an hour to move through the lines. This day the menu is goulash, green beans, rolls, pears, and milk followed by an assortment of desserts. Each month, the volunteers make sure the menu varies.

“The home-cooked meals go over well,” Warren said.

A tradition of service

Since 1994, the large, brick church, 210 Nottawasepee, in Napoleon has housed this effort to provide a warm meal on the fourth Saturday of each month for those who don't have a home or who have simply fallen on hard times. And toward the end of the month, there are often more people who are low on money and food stamps. Church members provide the groceries, volunteer their time to make the food and then serve it at the shelter. It is truly a team effort.

“It is a great way to serve the poor and feed the hungry,” Jue said.

“Everyone is so thankful.”

Seeing long lines of people who are struggling and in need of food is not easy, but Jue and the others involved said it is a rewarding way to help others.

“It's heartbreaking to see families who are homeless,” she said.

Bill and Diana Walker of Jackson helped start this long-running tradition. The couple, who attend the church, said the idea to serve a meal at the shelter came about in a Bible class they attended. Through the class, they chose the mission project and after serving the first meal at the shelter, Bill Walker said he saw there was enough interest to keep the monthly meals going. Fourteen years later, the activity is still successful.

“It has touched a lot of people,” he said, referring both to those helped at the shelter and those who have learned from serving others.

The Jackson Interfaith Shelter, 414 S. Blackstone St., provides temporary refuge for those who have nowhere else to go. In addition to housing the homeless, the shelter provides emergency food and clothing, as well as meals, to anyone who would like them -- not just guests staying there.

Hannah Garberich, assistant manager of the shelter, said the shelter is grateful for volunteers such as those from Napoleon United Methodist because they help ease the burden of serving three hot meals every day.

The shelter, a nonprofit agency, houses an average of 40 to 50 men, women and children at any given time.

Garberich said the majority of the shelter's funding comes from the community and that it couldn't function without the donations of time, resources and money. Whether it's in the form of a fully cooked meal or a few cold-weather accessories, the shelter welcomes all gifts from the community. ``We are so blessed," she said.

She stressed that homelessness ``doesn't have a face" and that difficult circumstances can fall on anyone. ``Anyone is welcome to eat here," Garberich said. ``We don't discriminate."

Dinner is served

On this Saturday, Heselschwerdt, Warren and the twins arrive at the shelter shortly after 4 p.m. to prepare for the 4:30 p.m. dinner served to shelter residents. At 5 p.m., the doors are opened to the community, and a line starts forming at least 15 minutes before this time.

As the volunteers enter the large cafeteria, they are greeted by a whiteboard message on the wall that says, ``Welcome Napoleon United Methodist Church -- God Bless You." They don blue aprons, gloves and hairnets before they start serving the food.

``I like cooking the food and serving it to the people," Heather Jue-Wong said.

Anthony Clemo, 30, a shelter resident, said he had been living there for about a week and that it seemed to be working out well. Clemo, who is from Seattle, had come to stay with a friend in the Jackson area, but his plans didn't end up working out and left him without a place to stay -- or a job. The shelter has given him the base he needs while looking for work.

``Everyone's been wonderful," Clemo said, as he waited in line for the dinner. ``Everybody seems to get along very well -- it's a good place. I'm down on my luck, but I want to get back on my feet and get back to normal."

As people move through the dinner line, Hesel-

schwerdt, Warren, Heather and Jonathan Jue-Wong stand behind the counter, waiting to fill up the plates as they go by. They offer smiles as well as food to those who walk through the line.

“Every month, they're here,” Garberich said, referring to the Napoleon volunteers. “It's incredible to see the community reaching out. They believe in our clients' success.”

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Community rallies to curb dropout rates

Posted by [Lynn Moore | The Muskegon Chronicle](#) May 09, 2008 09:25AM

For the 200 people sitting in a church sanctuary Thursday morning, the problem of students dropping out wasn't a school issue -- it was a community one.

Their discussions about dropouts didn't focus on what educators are doing right or wrong, but how individuals and organizations in the community can help.

And if the turnout at the Creating a Graduation Generation! conference at First Baptist Church in Muskegon Township was any indication, there's no lack of those willing to pitch in.

People from churches, social agencies, law enforcement, government and schools flocked to the free conference that turned into a brainstorming session on how to heal the epidemic of school dropouts.

They had filled every seat in the house by 8 a.m. to listen to a national speaker tell his own story of overcoming family dysfunction and severe learning disabilities to earn his master's degree in social work. For Christian Moore, founder and CEO of WhyTry Inc., salvation came from "Mama Jackson," the stern mother of a friend who took a young Moore under her wing and showed him hope.

Hope. The word kept surfacing Thursday. Hope, it was said, is what students need -- hope for their own future, hope that there are people who care, hope that they can succeed no matter their challenges.

And it has to come one student at a time, one relationship at a time, said Moore, who has developed a multi-media program for at-risk students that uses modern rock and hip-hop music and visuals to motivate students.

"We've got to get out of the box and put our intentions in a language the next generation understands," Moore said. "We have got to give these kids hope."

The seed for the conference came from the Rev. John Brown, pastor emeritus of First Baptist, and staff at Muskegon Public Schools who

connected after learning they both were seeking solutions to the dropout problem.

Muskegon officials have been grappling with a sagging graduation rate, that one estimate pegged at 46 percent. Nationally, the 50 biggest cities have dropout rates of 50 percent, Moore said.

Many believe graduation rates in Michigan -- which have ranged from 83 percent to 100 percent in Muskegon County -- have been artificially high because they have computed only the number of high school seniors who end up graduating.

A new formula for computing graduation rates that reflects how many students start as freshman and how many graduate four years later is expected to lower previously-stated graduation rates by at least 10 percent -- and call more attention to the dropout problem.

Brown said he was impressed by "such goodwill, such cooperation" shown by those who attended the morning-long conference.

"I think a lot can be done because you see the enthusiasm and commitment," Brown said, calling the response to the conference "all anybody could have possibly hoped for."

He expects the Muskegon Area Children's Agenda will convene a work group to follow up on ideas that conference attendees came up with during small breakout sessions organized for those in the faith, human services, business and education communities.

One suggestion was to provide free summer school.

It was the cost of summer school -- more than \$200 -- that prevented Shawnee Tate's daughter from attending to make up several credits she needs to graduate. Tate, a Muskegon Township mom who attended the conference, said her daughter recently learned she has to repeat her senior year -- a prospect that could drive many students to give up and drop out.

"She's so far behind, she has to take her senior year all over again -- she was devastated," Tate said.

Cooperation and sustainability are needed to get such good ideas implemented and working -- no easy feat, said Muskegon Public Schools Superintendent Colin Armstrong. For example, he said, every school has a highly successful teacher who everyone in the building knows about. And yet it's difficult to get others to model that teacher's practices, Armstrong said.

"Everyone here has at least one idea on how to improve the graduation rate," Armstrong said. "And yet, we have difficulty getting it in place, keeping it in place and getting everybody to buy in."

Armstrong established a minority youth advocate position to focus on 60 African American male students in his district at risk of dropping out. The position, held by Don Jones, has proven successful primarily because he provides one-on-one advocacy that focuses on problem-solving.

"We recognize these kids don't function in a vacuum," Jones said. "They have to deal with a multiplicity of problems, not only in the home, but in the neighborhoods they live at."

Jones said he has forged his own relationships with social agencies to get his job done -- an approach that was advocated again and again at Thursday's conference.

"No one entity is going to defeat this dropout problem," Jones said. "It's got to be a collaborative program."

The coordinated approach already is in place through Family Resource Centers developed by the Department of Human Services and in place at 10 schools throughout the county. There families can seek help for a myriad of problems, and educators can help students with such "baggage" as domestic violence, substance abuse and poverty that they bring from home to school, said Bruce Wright, social services program manager for the Muskegon County DHS.

Such willingness to work together impressed Moore, who said he was going to spread the word about Muskegon's community effort to address the dropout rate at his next speech in Manhattan.

"What you have in this room is very rare," he told those assembled.

In a motivating speech at the end of the conference, the conference's master of ceremonies Muskegon County Probate/Family Court Judge Gregory C. Pittman called on the community to set high standards for its students and to reach out to young people who need to be lifted up.

"That's what these students need -- they need that relationship, they need that hope and they need that expectation," Pittman said.

"We have the opportunity in this community to be whatever it is we want to be. There's no one coming in to save us."